



FEMA

Illinois' Winning Formula Buyouts Assist Residents

The State of Illinois - After many Illinois river communities experienced the devastation of the Great Midwest Flood of 1993, it became obvious that floodplains are easily reclaimed by rivers following severe weather events. With a combined formula to enforce local floodplain regulations and return the floodplain to its rightful owner, the State of Illinois has succeeded in reducing damage from the most frequent cause of disaster declarations in Illinois.

Flooding has been a constant drain on emergency response and recovery resources. Illinois geography includes 900 rivers and waterways with a combined length of 13,200 miles and the State is bordered by 880 miles of the Mississippi, Wabash and Ohio Rivers. The State's mitigation initiatives have resulted in the purchase of over 3,500 flood-prone structures and some adjacent vacant lots (as of July 2002). Communities benefit when these parcels are returned to their natural functions. Using voluntary acquisition grant programs, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) staff has approved and administered more than \$100 million in project activities including flood mitigation, ice storm preparedness and wind-resistant construction.

IEMA and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources/Office of Water Resources (IDNR/OWR) are aggressively pursuing the reduction of flooded properties, having proactively completed a detailed analysis of the National Flood Insurance Program repetitive loss structure inventory. More than 30 percent of these properties have already been removed from this list through voluntary buyouts.

The recipe for reducing flood damage can be attributed to a two-fold approach of eliminating existing flood problems and of local officials controlling new development in the floodplain, according to Paul Osman, Floodplain Management Program Coordinator, IDNR/OWR.

The success of the acquisition and floodplain management programs along the Illinois and Sangamon Rivers became evident during a recent flood event in the spring of 2002. The Sangamon River reached 10 feet over flood stage and the Illinois River topped at 15 feet over flood stage. County Emergency Managers and Local Floodplain Administrators reported if the buyouts had not taken place, many more houses would have been inundated with floodwaters. Horton remarked that at the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in the City of Grafton, an estimated 200 additional people would have faced the trauma of cleaning up had not 88 structures been removed from the floodplain by a successful buyout project.

"To be successful, you have to think outside of the box, have a can-do work ethic and avoid getting discouraged," said former State Hazard Mitigation Officer Jan Horton.

After the 1993 floods and subsequent acquisition program, IEMA organized the Interagency Mitigation Advisory Group (IMAG) to facilitate the implementation of various mitigation programs. In addition to IEMA, the group is composed of a variety of agencies, including the IDNR/OWR, Illinois Historic Preservation, Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, FEMA, and the American Red Cross, with staff who can provide expertise in acquisition and elevation projects.



State-wide,
Illinois



Quick Facts

Year:

1993

Sector:

Public/Private Partnership

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:

Private funds